

Story 1109 (1966 Tape 4)

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Çekerek kaza,
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Charity Above All

Ok Once there was and once there was not, when God's people were many, when it was virtuous to love much and sinful to love but little,¹ well, back in those days I traveled a short distance, I traveled a long distance; I crossed rivers, climbed over hills, and went over plains, but when I turned back to look at how far I had come, I found that I had gone no farther than the length of a grain of barley.² Back then, there were two *does* who could find no grass to eat, and so they grew very hungry. They entered a nearby village, crying as they walked in the streets in search of food. When they came upon

¹ This is a short tekerleme, the kind of nonsense jingle with which many Turkish folktales are begun. The tekerleme is used to notify the audience that a folktale is to follow. In Turkish the nonsensical lines rime, and thus the tekerleme is both informative and amusing.

² This is a formula common in Turkish tales to indicate a lengthy journey. To repeat almost endless details of a long journey would be to bore the audience; to announce that the details of the trip are being compressed or shortened would be to destroy the verisimilitude. The dilemma is neatly and pleasantly resolved with this metaphorical formula.

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longest, How can speak by him?

a merciful woman, they spoke to her, saying, "We are very hungry. Because the drought has been severe, there is hardly any grass anywhere. God has given us the ability to speak, and we now ask you for some bread."

Because the woman was a very compassionate person, she brought out bread and fed the deer until their hunger was appeased. After the deer had eaten the bread and drunk some water, they returned again to the mountains. After they had been there for a very brief time, they met three brigands who had fled into those same mountains. Each of these brigands had killed, over many years, a total of ninety-nine people. Now they were having some second thoughts about their behavior "What will become of us?" they asked each other. "We have no place to go in either this world or the next. How could our many sins ever be forgiven?"

The deer overheard this conversation, and again they were enabled to speak by the will of God. One of them said to the brigands, "There is a Satılmış Hoca in such-and-such a village." *brigands 123-124*

³ In pre-Republican Turkey the term hoca denoted a man who had two community functions, those of teacher and preacher. Today the term, used strictly, refers only to a preacher, for public-school teachers receive secular rather than religious education. In colloquial speech, however, the word hoca is still occasionally applied to teacher or professor, usually by that pedagogue's students. To the student it is more a term of endearment than one with religious connotation.

Friday

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Prayer

Go and attend the Friday prayer service⁴ at his mosque and afterwards ask him what you can do to be forgiven. If listen to him carefully, that hoca will explain to you whether or not there is any way for you to be able to go to heaven instead of to hell.

The brigands went on the next Friday to the village mosque that the deer had indicated and listened to the sermon. Afterwards they talked apart with the hoca about their problem. The hoca said to them, "For forty days you must not commit any brigandage or kill anyone. During that same period you must perform every namaz⁵ and pray to God. If you do that, will not only forgive you but will also grant whatever wish most

The three brigands returned to the mountain and did as the hoca had directed. They worshiped at every namaz and prayed to God for forty days. After they had completed forty days

⁴ Friday is the traditional Moslem sabbath, and the Friday noon service is the religious high point of the week. While there may not be sermons at other services, there is always a sermon at the Friday noon service.

⁵ Islam prescribes five daily prayer services that begin before dawn and end just after sunset. The faithful Moslem should attend a mosque for these services if a mosque is within reach; if no mosque is available, then one should carry on the ritualistic prayer service (known as namaz) alone.

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of such worship, they were visited by the blessed Hızır⁶

"What are your wishes?" Hızır asked them.

first of the brigands said, "There is a stud farm near Konya. I should like to have that farm." Hızır gave him that stud farm.

second former brigand said, "There is a farm near Eskişehir named Sultan Ahmet Farm. I should like to have that farm." Hızır gave him that farm.

third former brigand said, "My wish is to have a trustworthy and dependable woman as my wife."

blessed Hızır lifted the third man onto the back of his own horse and took him to another village. The trustworthy woman that Hızır had selected for the third man was already engaged, and her wedding was now in progress. Dressed and made up as a dervish, Hızır attended that wedding. His hair and his beard were long and tangled, and he had a very frightening appearance. Everyone was terrified by him. He said, "You will either fulfill my wish or I shall take all your lives!"

Disguise
⁶ Once a water-deity and fertility god--and still both those figures to most farmers in southern Turkey--Hızır is more widely known now as a granter of wishes, a last-minute rescuer from disaster, and a special messenger and agent of Allah. In these latter three functions he appears fairly frequently in Turkish folktales. Not mentioned by name in the Koran, a chapter of that work was later named after him. He is assumed to be the person instructing Moses in Chapter XVII of the Koran, where he is referred to by Allah simply as "our servant."

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"Father, what is your wish?" they asked.

"I wish to have Ayşe Hanım⁷ marry my son. This is my son here with me."

"But, Father, Ayşe Hanım is already engaged to another man, and these festivities are part of her wedding ceremony.

"I do not understand."

There was a wise man among the crowd who moved forward and said, "Let me ask him three questions. If he can answer them, then he deserves to have the girl; if he cannot answer them then we shall take him into the forest and burn him." When the crowd had agreed to this suggestion, the wise man went to the dervish and said, "There is a date pit planted at this spot in the ground. If you can make it sprout, grow, and provide us with its fruit as we stand here, we shall understand that you are a very special person."

The dervish only struck the ground with his staff and said, "O God!" and somehow the date plant broke through the surface of the ground, grew rapidly, and bore dates

"Very well," said the wise man. "This was the first test. Now if you can make a pumpkin mature suddenly from its blossom and feed it to us, you will have passed the second test."

⁷ Hanım is not a name but a term of respect meaning Lady. In Turkish all such complimentary and honorific labels follow the name of the person.

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Again the dervish struck the earth with his staff, and a pumpkin grew from a mere pumpkin flower. The dervish cut the pumpkin into slices and distributed them among the crowd.

The wise man said, "Very well. Now the last test is to answer this correctly: Are there more women or men in this world?"

The dervish thought for a moment and then said, "Those men who are ruled by the words of their wives are also called women. Therefore the correct answer must be that there are more women than men."

"That is correct," said the wise man, "and you are entitled to take the girl."

After Hızır had handed over the girl to the former brigand, he bade the two farewell and departed. The young couple left that place and began walking down the road. As they walked along, the former brigand said, "We have nowhere to sleep and no shelter from the weather. I wonder what we are going to do."

The trustworthy and dependable woman who believed in God and His Prophet said, "Let us go to the home of an ağa⁸ or ¹²⁷ - 129

⁸ An ağa (English, agha) is a rural landowner, sometimes wealthy, often powerful. The word does not indicate an official title but describes an economic status. They are often the principal employers of farm workers, and they are often viewed by their employees as harsh, driving, and abusive. The term ağa is also used in a complimentary way, as an honorific, for a distinguished or just older person than the one using the term. Thus an older brother is called ağa bey by his younger siblings. Ağa bey may be used as a deferential term to one older or more prestigious

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other prominent person and tell him that we are poor. We can offer to herd his cows and sheep in return for food and housing."

Going to the home of an ağa, they made this proposal to

He accepted their proposal, and gathering together all the people of that village, he said to them, "These strangers are poor, and everyone is to help them."

Everyone agreed to do this, and because the village was made up of 5,000 families, they received a great amount of assistance. They were given a house to live in and many other things. Everyone in that village had a guest stone near the mosque. If a stranger came to that village and sat on a guest stone, the owner of the stone would know that he had been sent a guest for the night; the owner would then provide food and shelter for his guest. Therefore Mıstık⁹ also had a guest stone made and placed it in front of the mosque.

After another year or two had passed, God one day said to the blessed (Hızır) "Go and see how those three brigands I forgave are now doing.

than the speaker. A taxi driver may refer to his passenger as ağa bey: a salesman speaking to a male customer may call him ağa bey.

⁹ This is the only time in the tale that the name Mıstık (a diminutive of Mustafa) is used for this character.

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Hızır went to Konya to the stud farm which the first of former brigands had been given. He found there a thriving very prosperous farm where large herds of cattle and large flocks of sheep were grazing. The owner was living as if he would never die. Hızır went to one of the workers on this farm and said to him, "Go and tell your ağa that I am an old and exhausted man. If he will lend me a horse and a man to help me, I shall go to the next village."

The worker went to his master and said, "My ağa, a poor old man has come along. He asks that you lend him a horse and a man to accompany him to the next village."

The ağa answered, "You go and tell him to get to the next village just the same way that he got here."

When the worker reported this to Hızır, a bolt of lightning struck the farm and a fierce storm followed. The rain fell so hard and so long that much of the farm's crops and livestock were swept away in the flood.¹⁰

¹⁰ Just as Christian saints do in countless medieval legends, Hızır and other Moslem saints often wander the earth testing the kindness and generosity of people. Those who are charitable are rewarded; those who are uncharitable are punished. Here it is not just a hit-or-miss wandering visitation but a test of two specific men, and the test is ordered directly by God. On the evening before Hidrellez Day (May 6, the day sacred to Hızır), good people have prepared food ready to give to Hızır if he should come to their door. Inasmuch as Hızır usually appears as an aged, white-bearded dervish, any old man who knocks on a door and asks for alms is likely to be treated most generously on that particular night.

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From there Hızır went to the Sultan Ahmet farm at Eskişehir which had been given to the second former brigand. This farm had also prospered, and everywhere one looked there were herds of cattle, flocks of sheep, vineyards and villas.

Hızır greeted the owner, "Selâmünaleykum."

"Aleykümselâm."¹¹

"I am old and poor. I have no money at all. It has been a long time since I have eaten any meat. Give me a sheep so I shall be able to eat some meat."

"I cannot give any animal from my flock. I shall give some money and you can go and buy what you wish with it."

Hızır responded, "Wherever your wealth came from, may it depart in a flood." The rain that began shortly after that continued until that farm was also destroyed.

From there Hızır went to the village of the former brigand had married the trustworthy and dependable woman. He went to the mosque and sat upon the guest stone of the third former brigand. This man came and took Hızır from the stone to his home. There Hızır said to him, "I want to eat forty different kinds of food."

¹¹ The traditional exchange of greetings between Moslems, especially between those who are unacquainted with each other. The terms mean "May peace be unto you," and "May peace be unto you also."

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"Very well," said the former brigand. And to his wife he said, "We have a guest who wishes to have forty different kinds of food." The woman immediately set about preparing forty different dishes.

After Hızır had eaten some of each of the forty food dishes, he said to the couple, "May God give you assistance in everything that you do." He then left their home satisfied.